



The snowy slope of Mount Baker. Notice the crevasse and tracks made by the rescuers.

Stairway to Heaven

Campers, hikers and mountaineers are people on the move. Unfortunately, that move isn't always upward. And when one of those hikers falls, rescue crews usually come around to pick up the pieces—often risking their own lives. If you saw *The Perfect Storm*, you must remember the efforts of the helicopter crew to rescue the people on the sailboat. One rescuer was swept out to sea.

When you get lost or stranded or fall, you're not the only one affected. The men and women who pluck people from precarious perches on their climb to the skies are putting their lives on the line to save yours.

Last June and July, three out of four weekends found the Whidbey Island, Wash., SAR crews in action, pulling injured people out of danger and delivering them to hospitals. Here are the stories from two of their rescues. 

In the Nick of Time June 25, 2000

By Lt. Chris Coté
SAR, NAS Whidbey Island

When a call came in from the county sheriff's office mid-morning on Sunday, June 25, our Search and Rescue (SAR) helicopter crew sprang into action.

Two climbers had fallen from the north face of Mt. Baker at 9,000 feet. One had died. We were tasked to pick up the injured climber from Roosevelt Glacier.

Manning the UH-3H helicopter were the pilot, LCdr. Scott Parrish, crew chief ADC Frank Leets, crewman AMS1 Marty Crews, HMCS Bryce Schuldt, and myself as co-pilot. At 1115, we flew to the Bellingham airport to pick up Delvin Crabtree, a spotter from the Bellingham Mountain Rescue Council.

On our way to Baker, Parrish and I calculated power required to hover at 9,000 feet, considering temperature, weather and the weight of the aircraft. Parrish determined the craft could not hover at that altitude without first jettisoning fuel. So we decided

we would have to hover at 8,000 feet and drop the rescuers at that point. Then they would have to climb the rest of the way.

We located the survivor and a ground party of two Canadian climbers and two Portland Mountain Rescue Team members. They were there for a climb of their own when they saw the injured man and assessed his condition as critical. He needed immediate medical care. They rappelled into a crevasse to find the other climber dead.

Finally, Schuldt reached the injured climber, who was coherent, but quickly deteriorating. Rescuers placed him on a litter for the thousand-foot descent to be picked up.

At one point, the man stopped breathing and needed emergency ventilation. As they continued downward, Schuldt checked the man's pulse and began CPR.

With my colleagues on the ground calling position, I again held the helicopter in a hover, my rotors within 3 feet of touching the slope. The litter carrying the patient was hoisted aboard, and we flew straight to a hospital, where he later died.

Avalanche conditions were a serious concern on the mountain, so we had to go back and rescue the worn-out rescuers. We picked them up and delivered them to a landing zone on Coleman Glacier, where I managed a one-wheel landing because of the steep slope. As we were landing, Parrish yanked on my sleeve. A warning light had come on in the cockpit. We headed for Bellingham and landed safely at 2100.

The red light turned out to be a warning of a potential crack in one of the helicopter's blade, making it no longer safe to fly. We had finished what we had to do in the nick of time. *A*

Rescuing Barbara Roller July 8, 2000

By LCdr. Kent Peckenpaugh
SAR, NAS Whidbey Island

My crew and I were on a mission to find and lift Barbara Roller of Seattle from Hanagan Pass near Mount Ruth and take her to St. Joseph's Hospital in Bellingham.

I was aircraft commander of the UH-3H rescue helicopter, call sign Firewood Five. Flying with me were co-pilot LCdr. Scott Parrish, crew chief AE2 Jeff Cornelius, utility crewman and swimmer ADC Frank Leets, and HM1 Mike Stephens.

We had limited daylight in which to launch, find Roller, get her into the helicopter, and get out of the mountains. Clouds were hanging over the mountains and threatened visibility.

As Stephens and I gathered all the information we could by telephone from a sheriff's deputy, Parrish, Cornelius and Leets made final preparations for the 6,000-foot-altitude mission and started up the helicopter.

En route, we established communications with the deputy and a volunteer spotter and made arrangements to pick up the spotter.

Once aboard, the spotter's extensive knowledge of the mountainous area made it easy to locate the ridge on which we expected to find Roller, her husband and son.

Fortunately, the cloud ceiling was above the pass but only by 400 feet. On the second sweep over the area, Parrish spotted a man in an open snowfield waving to the crew.

As Leets helped Parris and me with power checks and terrain clearance, Cornelius and Stephens made their final preparations for the next, most challenging, part of the rescue: hovering close to the trees and hoisting Stephens and Leets to the snowfield.

Based on power checks, we determined we'd have to jettison fuel to have enough engine power to hover at 5,100 feet. There would be no margin of error for Parrish as he flew into the hover, and no extra power.

Guided by Cornelius, Leets and the spotter, the helicopter hovered near Roller and her family. Stephens and Leets were lowered to the ground where they quickly assessed Roller's condition.

Her husband told us that she had fallen about 50 feet down a cliff, hitting a tree along the way. We suspected she had a severe lower-back injury.

We quickly, but gently, placed Roller in the rescue litter, and Firewood Five was called back in. Leets managed the trail line, a rope attached to the litter used to prevent spinning during the ascent, as Stephens rode up with Roller.

As Cornelius and Stephens secured the litter in the cabin area, Leets collected the remaining equipment and moved to a clearer area for pickup. Once Leets was recovered, we headed the helicopter and its cargo toward the hospital, just as the sun dropped behind the San Juan Islands. *A*

These stories also appeared in *Crosswind*, the base newspaper at Naval Air Station Whidbey Island.